

MORAL TESTIMONY

Junior Seminar

Fall 2018

Mondays 2-3pm

1879 Hall, Room 121

PROFESSOR

Elizabeth Harman

Email: eharman@princeton.edu

Office: 1879 Hall, Room 120

COURSE OVERVIEW

Suppose you saw your friend commit a serious crime, and you're trying to decide whether to tell the truth when you are questioned. You feel yourself torn between a moral duty of loyalty and a moral duty of honesty. In order to decide, you ask a moral expert what you should do. The expert says, "Protect your friend," and so you do. This blind obedience to the advice of an apparent expert may seem odd. And yet we trust the testimony of experts on all kinds of topics; why should morality be any different? We will examine whether it is reasonable to rely on moral testimony, and some implications of that question: Is moral realism true? Is it possible to make a rational decision about a transformative life experience, such as having children? Is a person blameworthy if she does something terrible that an expert told her was a morally permissible thing to do?

Course goals: The course has two major goals: to examine the questions above carefully, and to develop your skills at independent work.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grade Distribution:

20% Class presentations and class participation

20% Short papers

60% Final paper

An "F" on a paper or a presentation will result in an "F" in the course.

Class Presentations: Each student will give three class presentations. Each presentation should include a handout which is at most one side of a page, double-spaced. Your first and second presentations should summarize the main claims from the reading for that day and raise some discussion questions about the reading. A presentation can also include an objection to the reading, or an original claim by the presenter(s) about the topic in the reading. Your third presentation will be a presentation of your own argument from your final paper.

Class Participation: Do the reading for each week thoroughly and carefully. Typically only one paper will be assigned, but you may have to read that paper more than once. Every student is expected to participate fully in each day's discussion, and every student is responsible to try to make this happen. This means that students are responsible to try to speak up if they tend to speak too little and to try to pick and choose their moments if they tend to speak a lot. Students should treat each other respectfully. And students should listen carefully to what others say and respond to what has been said.

Final Paper: The final paper for this class is a paper of 5,000-5,500 words (about 20 pages). This paper is due the second day of reading period; this is a University deadline.

Short Papers: There will be one paper of 1,200-1,400 words (about five pages) and one paper of 2,250-2,750 words (about ten pages) due during the semester. Of the three papers you will write during the semester, each longer paper may be a substantial revision and expansion of the last paper (or it may be a new paper). Each of the short papers is worth 10% of your grade.

Late Papers: To hand in a paper on time, you must email the paper to me *and* place a hard copy of the paper in my mailbox within 24 hours. For the short papers, late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day late (for example, from A to A-, from A- to B+, and so on). A paper that is emailed to me after the deadline but within 24 hours is one day late; a paper that is emailed to me more than 24 hours late is two days late; a paper that is emailed to me more than 48 hours late is three days late; and so on. Weekend days count. If you finish a late paper during the weekend, email it to me and hand in a hard copy on Monday.

For the final paper, the deadline is a University deadline; I am not allowed to accept the final paper later than the deadline. (A dean's permission is required to get a late paper accepted.)

Extensions: Extensions will not be granted except under extreme circumstances.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is very serious. If I suspect plagiarism, I will refer the case to the University Committee on Discipline. If plagiarism is found to have occurred, this will result in an "F" on that assignment, and as a result, an "F" in the course. For an introduction to what constitutes plagiarism, please read the guide "Academic Integrity at Princeton," which is linked to from this page:

<https://pr.princeton.edu/pub/integrity/pages/intro/>. Consult me if you have any further questions.

CALENDAR

This calendar is tentative. Readings may be removed, and readings may be added.

First week (September 24):

- Sarah McGrath, “The Puzzle of Pure Moral Deference,” first two pages
- Alison Hills, “Moral Testimony and Moral Knowledge,” first three pages

Second week (October 1):

- Sarah McGrath, “The Puzzle of Pure Moral Deference” (the whole paper)

Monday, October 8, 10am: Topic Proposal for First Paper Due

Third week (October 8):

- Alison Hills, “Moral Testimony and Moral Knowledge” (the whole paper)
- Paulina Sliwa, “In Defense of Moral Testimony”

Monday, October 15, 10am: First Paper Due (1,200-1,400 words)

Fourth week (October 15):

- L. A. Paul, “What You Can’t Expect When You’re Expecting”

Fifth week (October 22):

- Reading TBA (probably on transformative experience, continuing the discussion begun by the L.A. Paul paper)

WEDNESDAY, October 24, 10am: Topic Proposal for Second Paper Due

Fall Break: October 27-November 4

Sixth week (November 5):

- Gideon Rosen, “Culpability and Ignorance”

Monday, November 12, 10am: Second Paper Due (2,250-2,750 words)

Seventh week (November 12):

- Michelle Moody Adams, “Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance”

Eighth week (November 19):

- Nomy Arpaly, “Why Moral Ignorance is No Excuse”

Monday, November 26, 10am: Topic Proposal for Final Paper Due

Ninth week (November 26):

- Reading TBA (probably introducing a new topic)

Tenth week (December 3):

- Student presentations of final paper argument

Eleventh week (December 10):

- Student presentations of final paper argument

Tuesday, January 8, 5pm: Final Paper Due (5,000-5,500 words)